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IS THE PRESENT MODE OF GRANTING CERTIFICATE- RIGHTS TO PREPARATORY SCHOOLS SATISFACTORY ?¹

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For the opportunity of addressing you this morning I am doubtless indebted to my position as secretary of the New England College Entrance Certificate Board, which, as the representative of twelve colleges, grants the certificate privilege to certain preparatory schools in New England. Although more than one mode of giving certificate-rights is now in use in this country, since the singular form of the word "mode" is used in the subject, I presume the action of the board which I represent will be the principal subject for the discussion. I find myself, therefore, somewhat in the condition of the Irishman who, when asked by the court whether he was guilty or not guilty, replied that he could not tell until he had heard the evidence. So far as I can see, the only thing for me to do in opening this discussion is to describe the plan followed by the board. If I do not succeed in making the method clear, I shall be pleased to answer any questions that may be asked.

The present mode of granting the certificate privilege is largely the result of evolution and not of foreordination. The board has not anticipated difficulties, but rather has met them as they have arisen. In order to give a clear view of the present condition, it will be well to speak briefly of the origin of the board and of what it was organized to accomplish. The idea of the board originated with the Commission of Colleges in New England on Entrance Examinations, which did much to forward uniform requirements for admission to the New England colleges, but which is now either dead or in a comatose condition. The members of the college faculties were divided in opinion about the relative merits of examinations and certificates, but all were united in believing that the certificate system must be developed or abandoned. In response to an invitation from this Commission on Entrance Examinations, delegates from nine New England colleges met in Boston, formulated a plan of mutual co-operation, and submitted the same to the colleges with the understanding that the assent of seven should be necessary for the formation of the board. Eight responded, and

¹ Read before the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, Cambridge, Mass., September 26, 1906.

the board was accordingly formed. Since then four more colleges have assented to the agreement and have been recognized by the board.

During the preliminary discussions certain things became very clear. The certificate system was not thought of as an easy method by which young people could enter college, or as a means of shirking labor and responsibility in the matter of examinations on the part of college officers. Neither did there appear any desire, on the part of the colleges, to assume a right to dictate to the schools as to methods or curricula, but rather a desire to foster the individuality of the school and of its teachers, to increase the independence of all connected with secondary education, and to counteract as far as possible the tendency to spend too much valuable time "in preparing for examinations." The object seemed to be to select in the most efficient way those students who were prepared to carry on the college work successfully. In fact, from the beginning, the board has honestly tried to bring about the ideal condition so recently discovered and described by Professor Thorndike in the *Educational Review* for May, 1906.

In granting the certificate privilege to certain schools for a longer or shorter time, the board neither claims nor imagines that it has enrolled on its list all of the good schools even in New England, or has omitted all of the poor ones. It simply declares, in publishing a list of approved schools, that it has good reason, founded on actual experience, for believing that the certificates of certain schools can be depended upon, and that it has good reason for hoping that the certificates of the remaining schools will prove to be of the same high standard. In the last clause the schools on the trial list are of course referred to.

I trust all present will agree with me that these ends are desirable, although the means about to be described may be imperfect and may work hardships in some cases. Let us now turn to the methods which the board has devised for the accomplishment of these ends.

When the board commenced its work, it had no list of approved schools inherited from a previous organization, neither did it have any data upon which to proceed. Its first act, therefore, after providing for its organization, was to request each college to notify each school on its approved list that the certificate privilege would expire at a certain date, which provided for two full school years within which to adjust itself to the new conditions, in order that no injustice might be done to any school which already had certificate privileges at the individual colleges. This act is characteristic of the desire of the board that, while it should endeavor to establish and maintain a high standard for the certificate privilege, it would also proceed with such deliberation as not to interfere with the regular working of the school.

The next act of the board was to provide for obtaining all the data possible to aid it in its decisions; and three kinds seemed to be available. In the first place, each college was requested to send to the secretary a complete list of the schools to which it, at the time of the inquiry, conceded the certificate privilege, and to classify these schools into four groups, the first to contain those which were regarded as satisfactory, the second those from which too few pupils had been received to warrant the expression of an opinion, the third those which were regarded as doubtful, and the fourth those which were considered unsatisfactory. Schools from which no pupil had been received within three years were placed in the second class.

Each college was also requested to send to the secretary the number of persons admitted on certificate from each school in each subject and the number of those in each case who had proved unsatisfactory. These data were the less satisfactory because of a lack of uniformity in the reports. Some of the colleges reported the number who had failed to pass; others reported those who, having passed, had failed to obtain a satisfactory standing; while a third class, considering that the failures in many cases were not due to the preparation, did not report even all those who had failed. When one college would report 40 per cent. in some subjects unsatisfactory, and another college only 5 per cent. or 6 per cent. in the same subject, it became necessary for the board to recognize a personal equation. At present the report is based on the number who fail to pass during the first term or semester, and the reports have become more uniform. Records of this kind were obtained for the three years 1900, 1901, and 1902, and before the first decisions were made the reports for 1903 were available.

And finally, when the schools were notified by the colleges that their certificate privileges would terminate at a certain time, they were directed to apply to the secretary of the board, should they desire the certificate privilege for the future. To each principal who applied was sent a pamphlet containing two pages of general questions relating to the size of the school, the number of teachers, whether college graduates or otherwise, the time allotted to each course, etc., two pages of questions for each of the more important subjects accepted for admission and one for the less important. It was intended to include every subject that could be presented for admission at any college represented on the board. Such a set of questions is very difficult to frame. The end in view was to secure satisfactory information concerning the different curricula, both as to their extent and as to the nature of the instruction given, and not directly or indirectly to dictate in respect to either. The board does not expect any one school necessarily to give instruction in each of the subjects mentioned. It does, however, require that a sufficient number of courses shall be offered to prepare for

some course leading to a degree in some one of the colleges represented on the board, and that, if a subject is to be included among those in which certificates are to be granted, an adequate number of periods shall be assigned to it, and a sufficient amount of apparatus for its proper presentation must be in the possession of the school. For example, it is not necessary for a school to include in its curriculum any of the sciences; but if chemistry or botany is to be included, more than a single term of from twelve to fifteen weeks, with three or four periods per week, must be assigned to it, and certainly for the former subject there must be sufficient apparatus to enable each pupil to perform individual experiments. Just at this point permit me to say that the board has reason for specially criticizing the time allotted to the courses in history, botany, astronomy, and physiography. After reading from four to five hundred of these applications, the secretary of the board takes pleasure in congratulating the principals of the schools on the whole for the careful and complete way in which these reports have been made out.

These three different kinds of data were what guided the board in making its first list of approved schools. I desire to emphasize especially that the board was forming an entirely new list of approved schools, and not trying to revise an old one, and that the new list was based upon the actual experience of its constituent members, and not upon the general reputation of the schools in question, or upon their relations to other institutions. Of course, some mistakes were made, but the board has always been ready upon request to reconsider a decision at its next meeting, and even between the meetings whenever it has appeared that the data upon which it acted were so incorrect as to have affected the former action.

While forming this first list, the board found a considerable number of schools which had had the certificate privilege at one or more of the colleges represented on it, about which it did not have sufficient data to warrant a full approval, but against which there was little of a positive nature to be said. Realizing that it was a transitional period in the certificate system, the board decided to form for one year a trial list for such schools, hoping to obtain during that year more data. This scheme worked very satisfactorily in many cases, enabling the board without hesitation both to approve some schools and to reject others. A doubtful list still remained, and those schools which could assure the board that they had pupils to send to college during the next academic year were continued on this trial list, and the remaining schools were notified that the full certificate privilege could not be granted them.

The trial list, as outlined above, was at first regarded as a temporary device for meeting an emergency that arose in connection with the forma-

tion of the first list. It has, however, been developed into a permanent part of the system, in order to meet the difficulties that arise in dealing with schools from which certificates have not been received by any college represented on the board. The fundamental principle upon which the board's action is founded is that no school shall be approved until the accuracy of its judgment in granting certificates has been put to a practical test. The experience of the board has taught it that a school may prepare pupils who will successfully meet examination tests and yet give certificates which cannot be depended upon. The board therefore at its last meeting decided that no school should be placed on the approval list for the full period of three years until it had been on the trial list for one year. As the trial list carries with it, to some extent, the approval of the board, it was found necessary to restrict its membership to such schools as would probably be finally approved. After such discussion the board has, therefore, adopted the rule that "any school in New England which has never been rejected by the board, and has sent two or more satisfactory students to any college or colleges represented on the board, and which has a candidate for admission for the ensuing year, may be placed on the trial list;" a rule which contains two material restrictions. As the board does not consider records more than four years old, and in some cases not more than three years old, it is implied in this rule that the entrance examinations of the students in question must have been taken within three years of the date of the application, and that the students must have been admitted to college and must have obtained a record. The mere ability to pass the entrance examinations is not regarded as sufficient, as the real test is ability to carry successfully the college work. This leads me, speaking for myself and not for the board, to say that preparation for college should consist of two elements, the moral as well as the intellectual, and that, in my opinion, the former is as important as the latter in any secondary school. Far too many college men and women, who are able to pass the entrance examinations, fail at the very beginning of their college life, or, if they succeed in reaching the second year, make a failure of their college course, because of the lack of this training in the preparatory school. But to return: The board must soon plan some definite way of distinguishing between pupils taking the examinations with the approval of the principal of the school from which they come and those who come without such approval. It is obviously unfair to the school to hold it responsible for pupils it does not recommend, and this test is useless if the school is allowed to select its representatives after the results are known. By the formation of this trial test, so guarded, the board hopes to be able to adhere strictly to the fundamental principle already enunciated, that it will base full approval only on its own actual experience.

So far we have considered only the first applications of schools. Schools that have asked for approval, and have been refused by the board, may be divided into two classes: first, those which have been refused because they have not sent a sufficient number of pupils within the stated time to colleges represented on the board; and, second, those which have been refused because of the poor record their pupils have made at these colleges. The first class are not affected by the first application and stand in the same relation to the board as schools that have never asked for recognition, and as soon as they have completed a satisfactory record, an application will be received and passed upon by the board. The second class stand in an entirely different relation. In respect to these schools, the following rule has been adopted: "Schools which have been rejected because of the poor records of pupils sent to college on certificate, or which shall be dropped from the list of approved schools for cause, must send at least three pupils to the colleges connected with the board within a period of three years before a new application for approval will even be considered." Furthermore, in considering such an application the board would feel that a school, having been tried and found wanting, must have established a thoroughly good record before it can expect to be approved.

It now remains to consider the attitude of the board toward schools which have been fully approved. The board retains the right to drop a school at any time, if the record in its opinion calls for such action; but this measure will probably seldom be resorted to, except in extreme cases, until due warning has been given. The board has adopted two forms for warning such schools on its approved list, one simply calling attention to the record of the school which is stated in the warning, and the other adding the positive statement that, unless improvement follows, the certificate privilege may be withdrawn. These notices are sent when the record in some one subject is very poor, although the rest of the record is excellent, or when even a few failures have been reported in a number of subjects. In the first case it is the opinion of the board that that department of the school needs a thorough reorganization, while in the latter case there is probably carelessness in the granting of the certificate, possibly a too low minimum mark having been adopted. Although the period of approval is limited in all cases to three years, the schools at the expiration of this time do not stand in the same relation to the board as new schools. While the board will not grant a continuance of its approval without a direct request from the school, it does not require the filling-out again in detail of the application blank which a new school uses in describing its curriculum. It simply desires that the school shall make a formal request by means of a blank furnished by the board, and shall state any material changes in its

curriculum. Once approved, a school always retains the favor of the board if the certificates of the school do not fall below par at the colleges receiving them.

The task assigned me is practically ended, but I may facilitate the discussion somewhat by calling attention to some of the complaints which have reached me. They can be classified as follows:

1. Too long intervals between the meetings of the board.
2. A supposed prejudice on the part of the board against the small school.
3. The refusal of the board to recognize the records made at colleges not represented on the board.
4. The difficulty experienced by a new school in obtaining recognition.

The board meets annually in May, and it does not usually meet at any other time. During the first year there were two meetings, in order that the applications might be promptly dealt with. Schools on the approved list are allowed to apply for a continuation of the certificate privilege in advance, so that they may always know a full year before its expiration if the privilege is not to be continued. The schools on the trial list are placed on that list in order to obtain additional evidence, and often this cannot be obtained before the first of April. Consequently, an additional meeting of the board would in no way benefit these. The only schools, therefore, which an extra meeting of the board would benefit are those which are seeking approval, and these are now comparatively few in number. At this time only four of this kind are waiting for the decision of the board. The schools are required to have their applications in the hands of the secretary before April 1, in order that the meeting of the board may be held early in May, and the decisions known in season to enable pupils, who are not to obtain a certificate, to take the examinations.

As to the second complaint, I can positively assert that there is no prejudice on the part of the board against the small school. A school having two or three teachers, and sending on the average only one pupil to college each year, is readily approved if the pupils sent are satisfactory. This objection is imaginary, not real.

There seems, however, to be a real difficulty on the part of many principals in understanding the reasons why the board does not recognize records made at colleges not represented on the board. If there were no other reasons, the fact that it would be necessary for the board to classify the colleges, and designate those whose records would be accepted, would be sufficient to prevent the adoption of such a plan. In addition to this, the board cannot consent to put a college not connected with it to the trouble of sending complete records of all the representatives of a school for three or four years, and an incomplete record would be misleading. Still further,

the records of a college admitting only by examination would be useless to the board, as they would furnish no indication of the value of a certificate from the school. The pupils representing the school would have been chosen by the college and not by the school, and would furnish better evidence for the approval of the college than for the approval of the school. More than this, if I may be permitted to speak quite plainly, principals have written to me requesting that their schools be judged by the records of pupils sent on examination to some other college, rather than by those sent on certificate to the colleges connected with the board, because they sometimes gave certificates to pupils who, they thought, might fail on the examinations. Even though the statements of all colleges were the same, it would thus be impracticable to accept records from colleges not represented on the board. If the board were claiming to establish a list of the best schools in New England, it might be necessary to consider such evidence. But, as I said at the very beginning, this is not the object of the board.

The claim that it is difficult to establish a private school in New England, especially if it be a school for young ladies, is well founded. It cannot be avoided without sacrificing the very fundamental principles upon which the action of the board is based. When such a school has established the credit of its certificate, it will be heartily welcomed. A place on the list is a valuable asset for such a school, and the cost should be met cheerfully.

In closing, allow me to say that the board does not for one moment feel that it is infallible, or that the last word has been said as to its methods of procedure. The board is not hostile to the secondary school, but desires to be in full sympathy with it, and will gladly co-operate in any attempt to improve secondary-school work. The problem of the college and of the preparatory school is the same. The one can prosper only as the other prospers. The board desires only to guard the certificate system in order that by preserving that system we may safeguard the independence of the preparatory school and save it from the doom of becoming a mere cramming machine to which the examination system left to itself would inevitably condemn it.